COLOR TIPS AND TRICKS 2

a pdf by iniro/eskbl

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Authors Note:
This is **not** an exhaustive, complete guide on color theory. This pdf is a compilation of my own personal tips/tricks, condensed explanations on how I think about color, and how I use it in a way that works for me. I still have a lot to learn, so please take all advice in this pdf with a grain of salt!

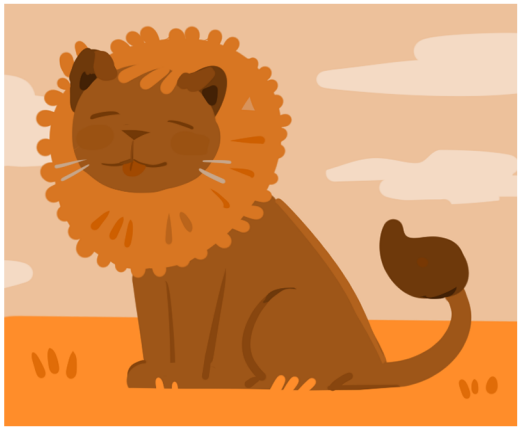
Apologies if pages seem to jump from topic to topic, they were made without any specific order in mind.

Regardless, I hope this pdf is useful to you in some way. Special thanks to my patrons for supporting me and watching me create this from start to finish!

You can find me on
- twitter.com/eskbl
- patreon.com/iniro

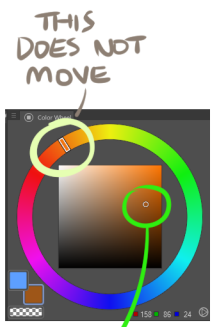
More Color Harmonies

Most people know analogous, complementary, and split complementary color schemes - but there's more than that! There are also monochromatic, triadic, and tetradic color schemes. Here's how to recognize them:



In a **Monochromatic** color scheme the hue wheel stays in one spot, only the color picker is moved to get different hues/shades/tints.

Has a very unified, cohesive look, can help simplify your colors.



Triadic color schemes are split evenly on the color wheel. Not to be confused with split complementary color schemes, which are not always equidistant on the wheel.

TRIADIC MAKES A TRIANGLE SHAPE!

You can make one color dominant, and the other two as accent colors, but this isn't a hard rule.

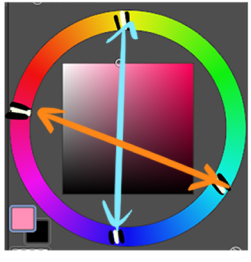
Adds color variety and vibrancy!

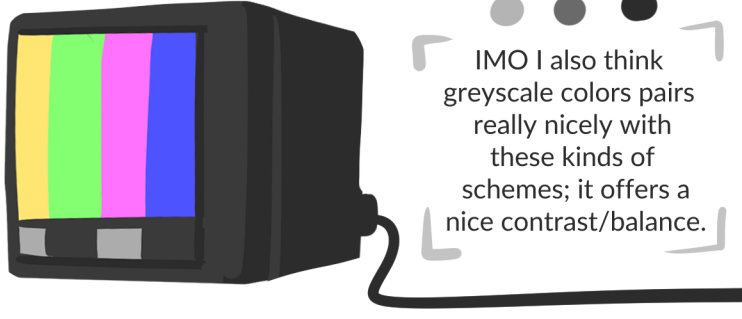
SPLIT COMP IS MORE OF AN ISOSCELES SHAPE

Tetradic color schemes are when four colors are spaced evenly between them on the color wheel. Having more colors however does make it a bit more tricky to balance.

Tetradic schemes are usually made of two pairs of complementaries, forming a square or rectangular shape on the color wheel.

Aka why it might sometimes be called a double complementary color scheme.





IMO I also think greyscale colors pairs really nicely with these kinds of schemes; it offers a nice contrast/balance.

I usually have to fiddle with value/saturation levels so one color doesn't overpower the others (unless I want it to!) But it's a nice way to add some fun to a piece.

Planning your Colors

Usually, I start with an initial idea of what I want and play around with colors until I find something that works.

The idea can be simple: "I want characters backlit by a window behind them."

One great method is to block out a super messy thumbnail. No details here, just try to see how the colors look by itself.

Some things I try to consider:

- How the lighting will affect the character colors.
  (rim lights, shadow colors, etc)
- How can I use colors to influence overall composition.
  (keeping the charas as the main focus)
- Is the overall palette cohesive?
  (am i using analogous/ complementary/split complementary, etc)

Don't be afraid you're 'ruining' the art if your colors don't turn out how you want on the first go. Starting is key!

Books are kept at similar warm colors, not meant to stand out
Window frames and emphasizes character
Cooler colors on a piece with mainly warm colors will stand out.

'What if i don't have an idea on what colors to use?'

That's ok too!

Often times I'll slap down random colors and try to find something that works for me.

Exploring colors like this helps me find ideas along the way, as opposed to just staring at a blank canvas.

Then I try to figure out my lighting, composition, etc afterwards.

Color palette generator websites are also useful to start off of!

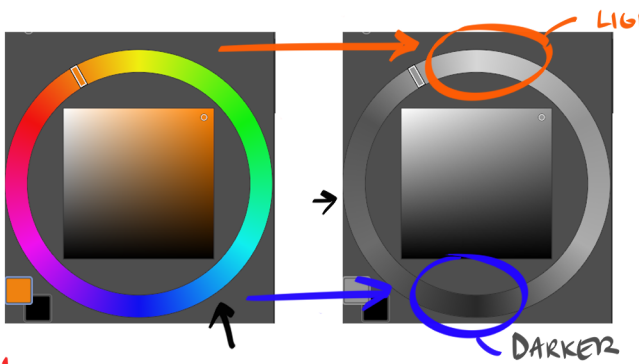
I usually end up adding or changing colors along the way instead of sticking strictly to it.

Generally the more you plan in advance, the less things you will have to go back and fix.

Value + Hue

Value refers to how light or dark something is.

Generally lighter colors give higher values and darker colors give lower values.



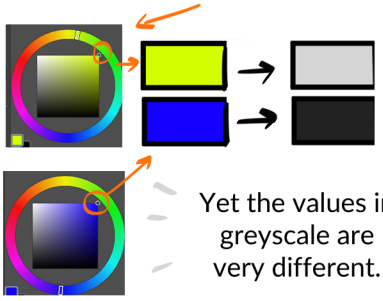
See how different parts of the hue wheel look much darker or lighter than others.

Notice how all the display colors on this wheel are set at the **same** saturation and brightness level, yet display different values in greyscale mode.

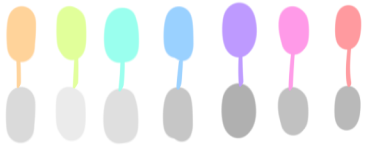
THIS IS BECAUSE..

Value is not only affected by brightness and saturation.... your hues can **also** affect value!

ex: These two colors are both at max saturation + brightness.



Yet the values in greyscale are very different.

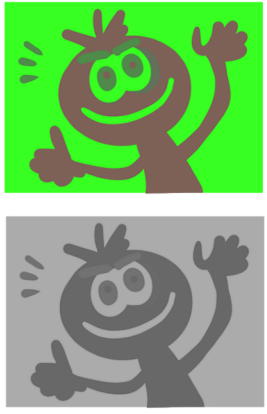


In general, I like to keep in mind that yellower /greenish hues tend to read lighter in value than say reddish /blue hues.

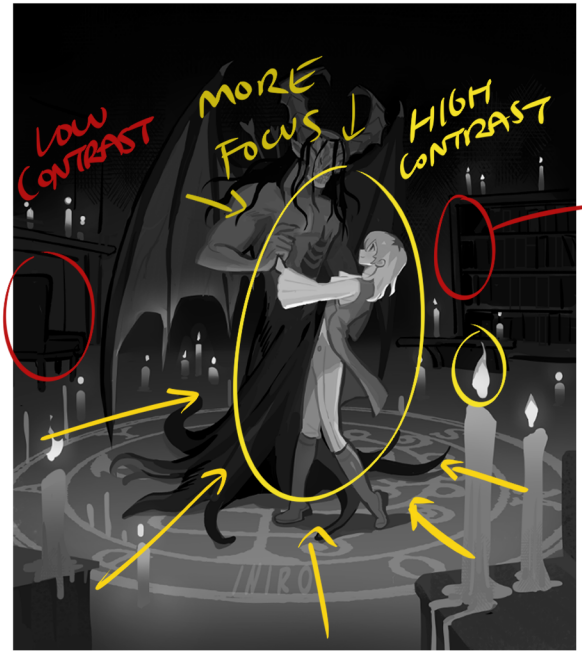
In color, this figure seems to stand out pretty well against the red...but in greyscale you can barely see them.

The very desaturated purple and the super saturated red used are at very similar values, making it hard to distinguish the figure from the background. It's important to check your values often!

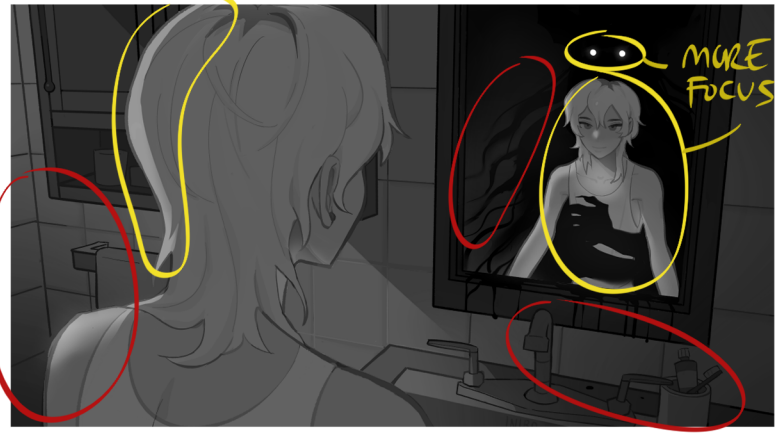
Here I've only changed the hues, but it looks much clearer value wise.



Using value contrast in your art can help overall readability as well as guide the viewer's eye.



On the flip side you can use lower value contrast to push things away from the viewer's focus.



it's up to you what effect you want to show!

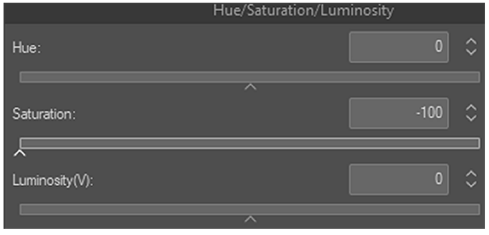
one trick you can use is to squint!
(or zoom out)
If it's unclear what the image is you might want to try adjusting your values.

Also, instead of checking values via the hue & saturation adjustment, I make a new 'color' property layer filled with pure black or white to get more accurate values.

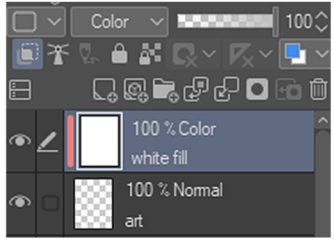
On the left image you can see it's slightly washed out and some values dont even show up.

With hue & saturation slider

With color property layer



VS



Manually Changing a Character's Colors

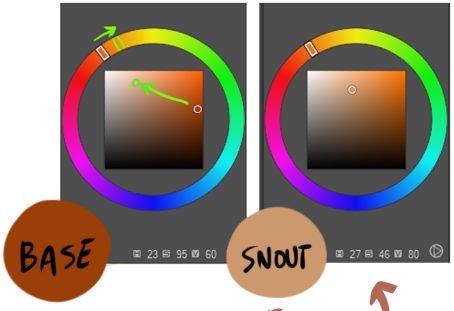
You can use color adjustments to shift this character's colors to purple.

However, if you want to change them manually, here's how I do it!
(I personally like this way because I feel it gives me finer control over my color choices.)

1

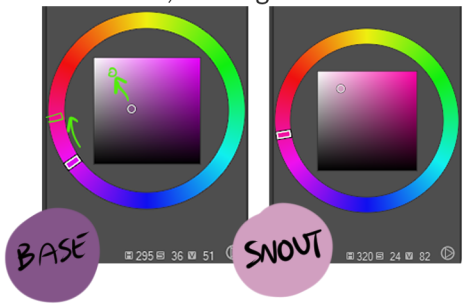
Ex: The movement from the base color to snout color is achieved by moving the color wheel to a more orange shade, and the color picker up/left towards a light color.

First I analyze the color wheel **movement** for each different color in comparison to the main/base color of the character.



Then with those in mind I **loosely** copy those color wheel movement with different colors, starting off with a more purple base.

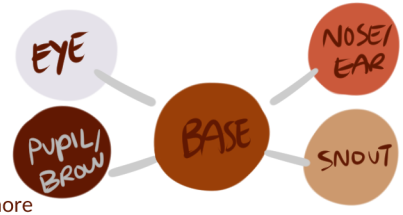
2



Both moved in a similar pattern and distance.

3

Then I do the same for the rest of the colors.



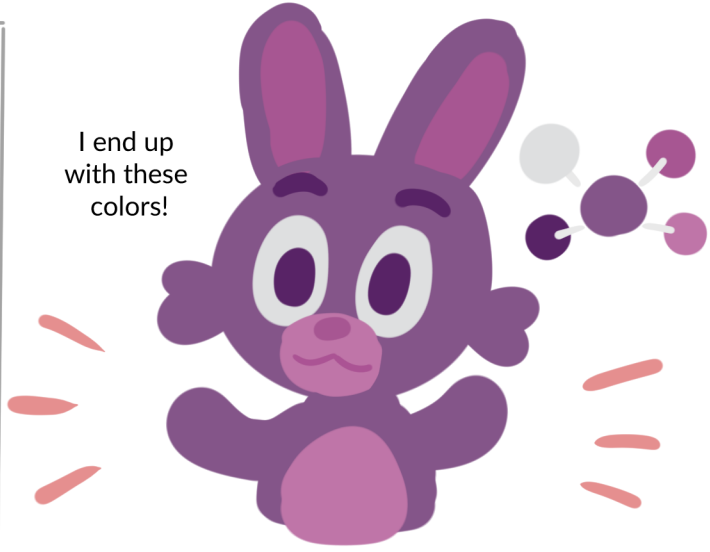
A lot brighter/cool toned than base.

Pinker/lighter than base

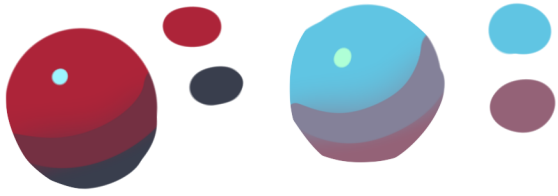
More light and desaturated than base.

Darker and more saturated than base

I end up with these colors!



Shading Warm Lineart with Cools and Vice Versa.



I paint similarly with lineart to add pops of color.

Ex: I start with a warm color, shade with a warm color, then switch to a cool color for areas of shadow (or interest).

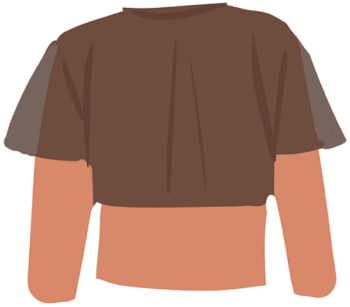
I use smaller amounts.

Coloring Semi-Transparent Clothing

Here's some things I keep in mind when I want to paint a character wearing any type of sheer or semi-transparent material.

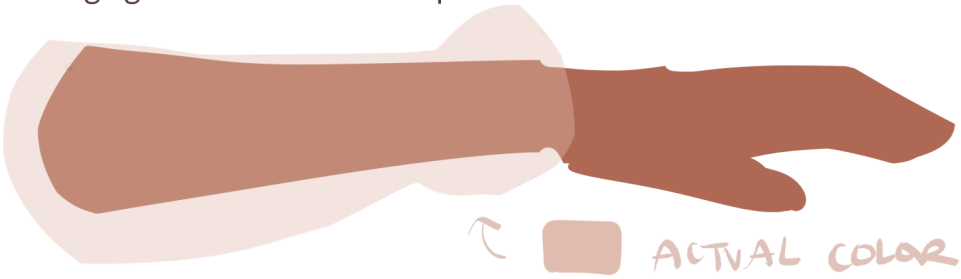
Less translucent at areas where the material folds/

Sheer cloth/material tends to have softer shadows/lighting.

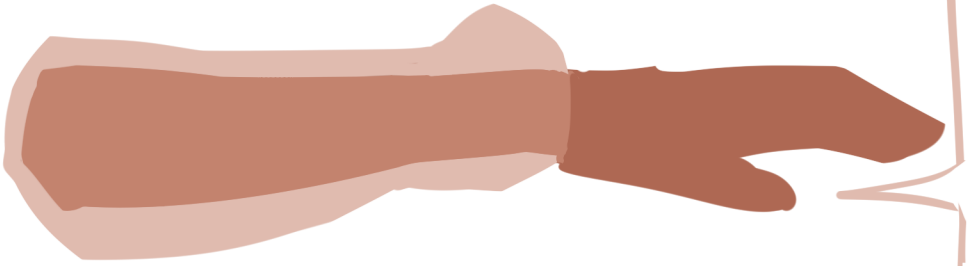


Dark semi transparent material makes everything underneath look darker.

Painting light colored semi transparent material:



You can create a separate sleeve layer set to 40% opacity.



Or you can manually pick colors.

I prefer doing it manually since I feel like it gives me finer control but both methods can get the job done!

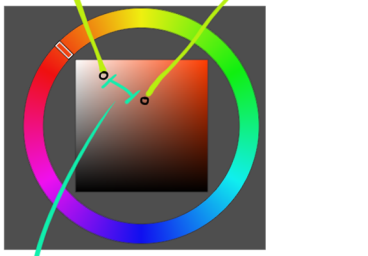
The closer the color is to the material, the less see-through it looks, basically the same as setting your layer to a higher opactiy.

Note: This is not the same process I use for painting dark transp. material

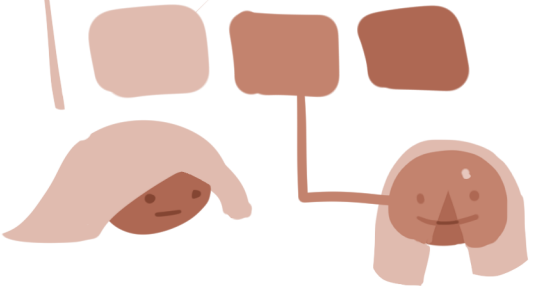
Ex:

Light semi transparent material

Base skin, object, etc, color



Picking between these two colors for the color under the sheer material.



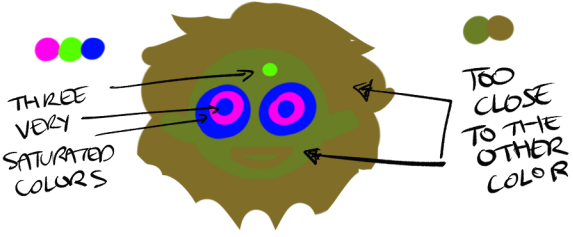
Tada!

Painting with 'ugly' colors

Certain palettes can be seen as unappealing (usually because the brightness/value/hues etc aren't combining well).

Ex: I'll draw a character based off a random 'ugly' palette I found:

Initial observations:



I pick a main base color and make decisions about what colors to keep + what to change. I then adjust some of the other colors in relation to that base color.

Toned down to better match base color's brightness.

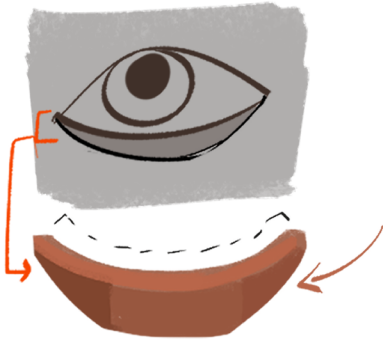
Kept the same.

My chosen base color was fairly desaturated, so I made the others more desaturated but kept the bright pink for the area of interest (the eyes).

Updated color palette

In the final I also added a lot of hue shifts based on the updated palette colors.

Painting Bottom Eyelids



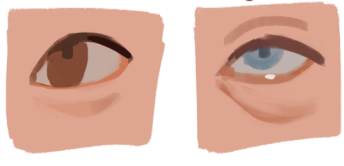
Generally, I put darkest shades near corners to add depth.

Top area is the waterline, I tend to use a warmer + lighter color.

Treat like 3d object!

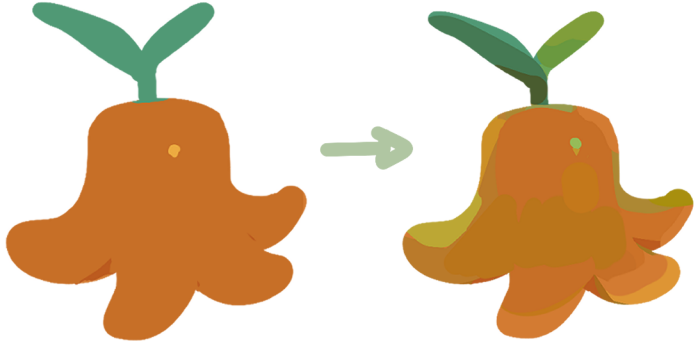
Age can also affect appearance

Some bottom lids are more full or subtle.



CAN USE HIGHLIGHTS TO EMPHASIZE YOUR SHAPES (OR NOT)

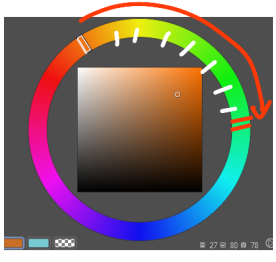
Adding Extra Colors/Hues to Your Art

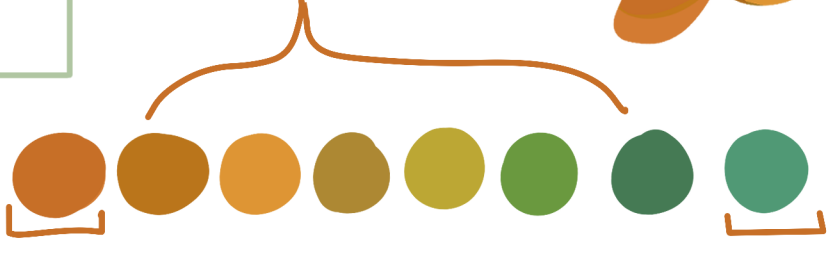


First I decide what color I want to add to my base color.

Ex: I want to add some greenish tones to my orange carrot thing.

Then I look at the colors in between orange and green on the color wheel. I'll be using this color pathway to add some color variation.

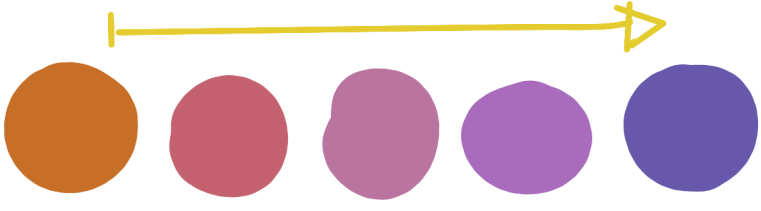


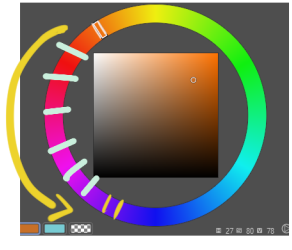


Example of some inbetween colors I can use to shade with.

I pick from generally a similar saturation level for most of these.

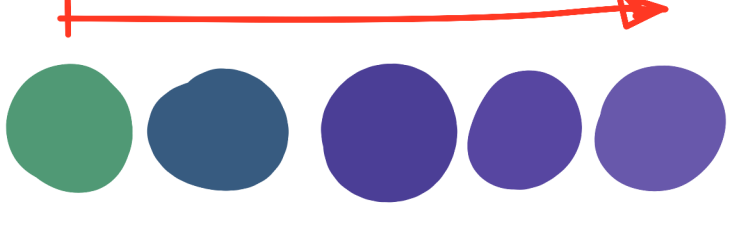
Here I did the same except I added purple tones to my orange.

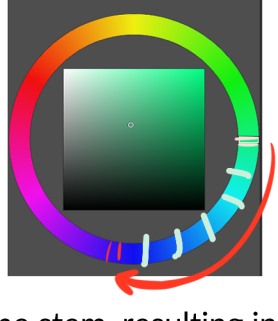




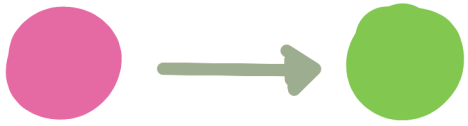
It's up to you which direction/path you want your hue picker to move. Think about what lighting/mood you want the subject to be in.

Because of the path I took on the color wheel, my in between colors are more reddish/pinker tones.

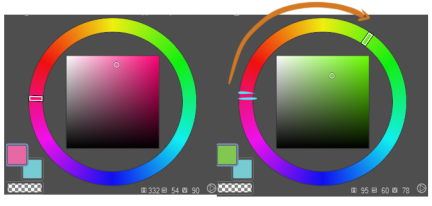


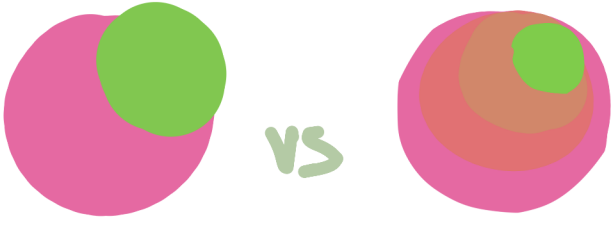


Separate but same process to add purple tones to the green of the stem, resulting in more blues and purples.



Again same method.

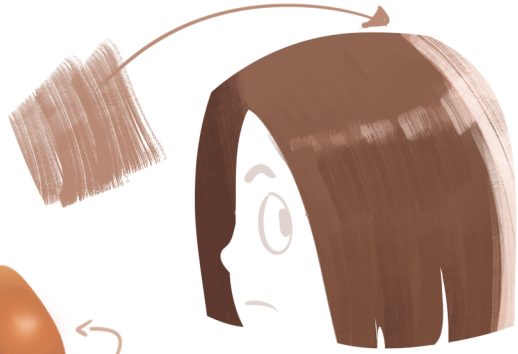


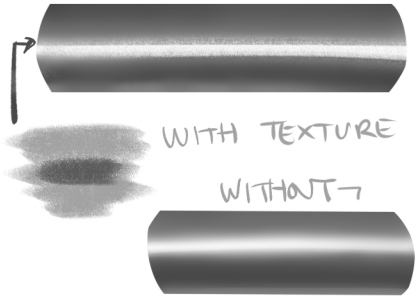


It can be useful for easing the transition to a new color + helps add more interesting hues to your piece.

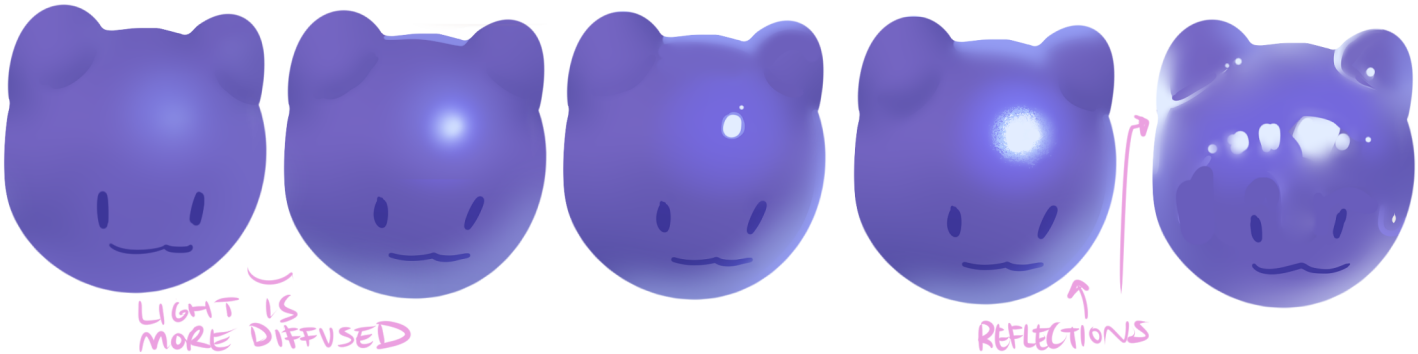
Highlights and Material

How you paint highlights can help suggest the material of the object and/or the lighting being used.





I recommend experimenting with different highlight shapes (textured brushes are great for this)



Softer/matte look with less reflections → Increasingly more highlights and reflection for shiny/polished/wet stuff.

Play around with it, see what type of highlights works for you & your drawing!

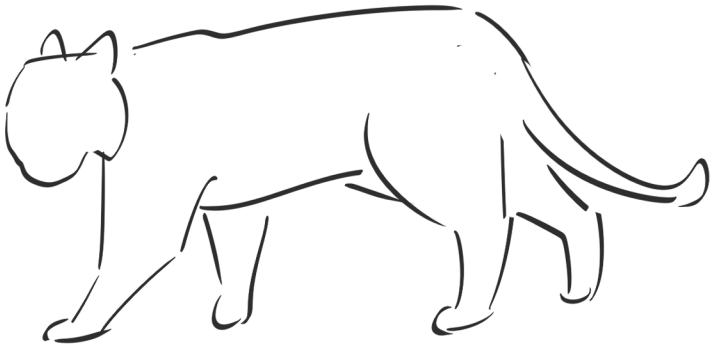
Color Blocking

When painting I start with vague blocks of color to broadly identify areas of shadows/plane changes.

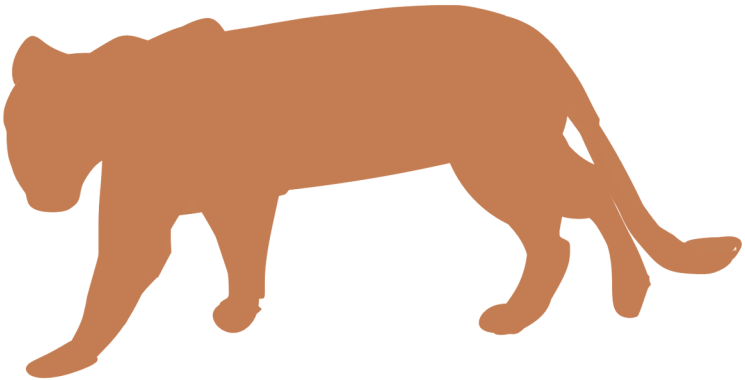
Then I gradually work on details. It helps me avoid zooming in and working on one area for too long.

I also like blocking out shapes to get more accurate silhoette/proportions when I do studies.

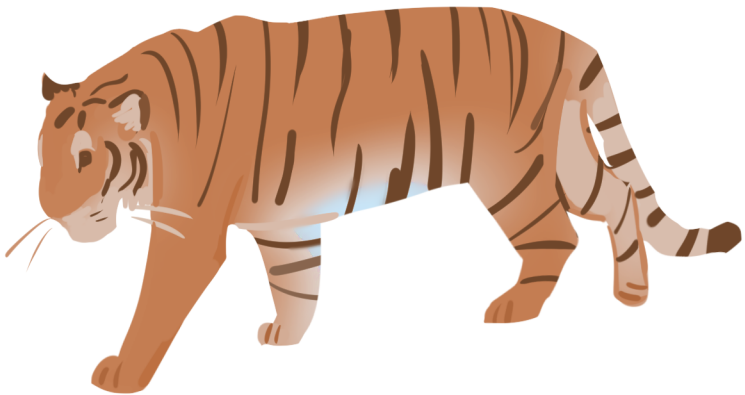
(It's harder for me to gauge proportions accurately when i just eyeball it.)



Rough block - not focused on accuracy here.

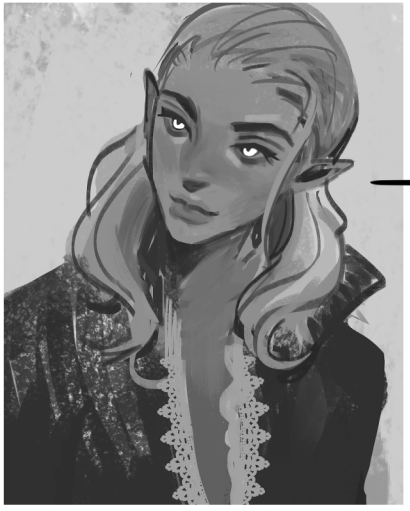


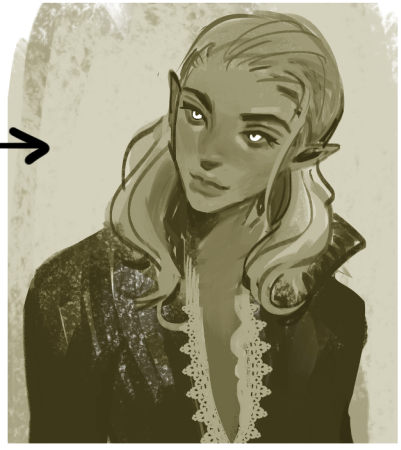
Comparing the ref to the silhouette I can see inaccuracies more clearly/fix them.
From here on I usually go on to painting/details.

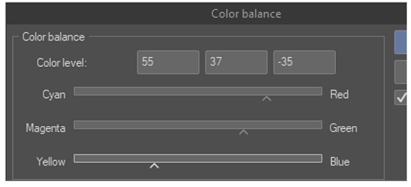


B/W to Color

This can be challenging because it's easy to get colors muddied up with all the greyscale.

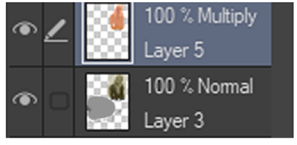






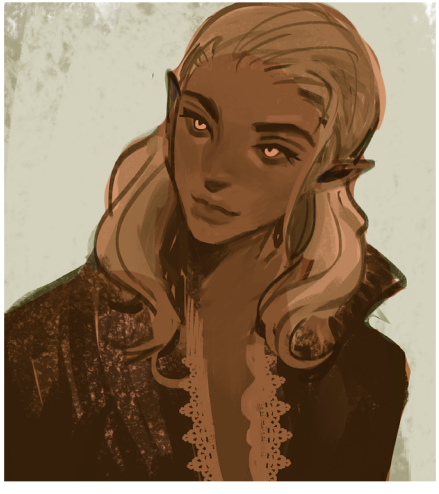
1. What you can do is not start off with black/white. It's easier to start on color, so before painting I use color balance to add a bit of greenish tint to my b/w layer.

2. Then I use a multiply layer over my b/w layer and lay down base colors.



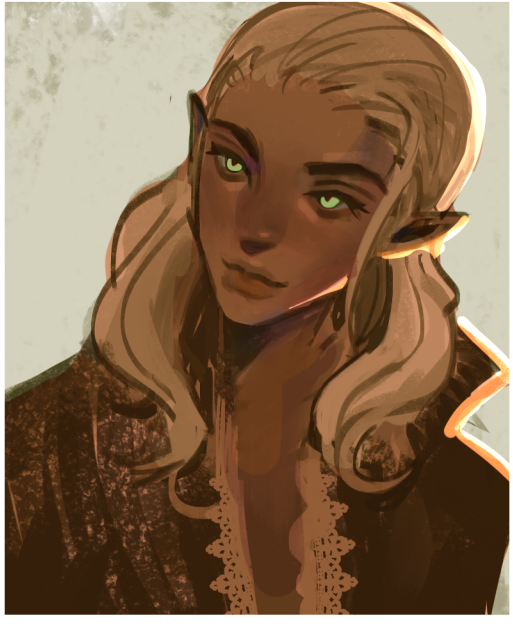
3. Base colors without the green tint.

Same base colors with the green tint.



4. Then, I continue painting, adding warmer colors to areas like the nose/lips and cheeks.

(I also used a glow layer for lighting.)



Though both can work depending on what you're trying to go for.

Choosing Colors for Character Design

There's lots of different reasons to use certain colors in character design! Here's a few:

The green of the hair is more saturated + used less in the overall design in order to help draw the focus to the face.

I want this character's main trait to be about running, so I made the shoes an eye catching and saturated red.

Contrasting colors between two characters (or more) can help show their dynamic with eachother or what type of characters they are.

Some questions you can ask when thinking up a character's palette:
What part of the character do I want people to focus on first? What are my character's important hobbies/powers/personality traits etc? What kind of enviro does my chara live in?

Here I'll try to make different palette choices for the same chara based on random traits:

Nature, kind,
with focus on dress.

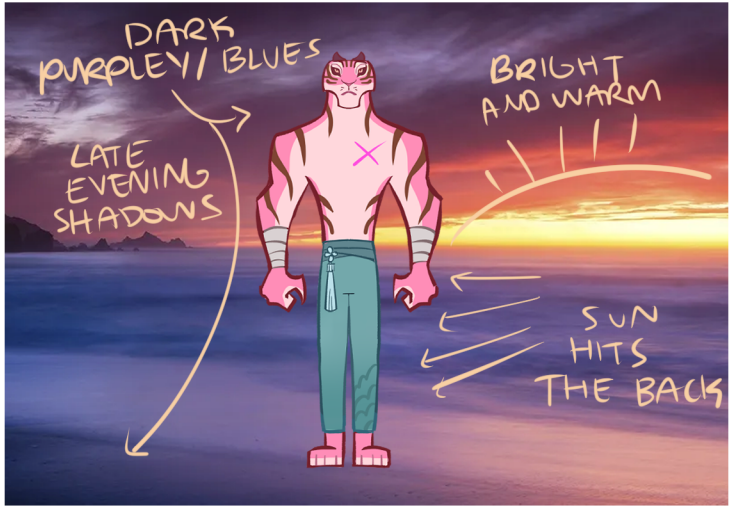
Fun, candy,
focus on head/face.

Mysterious, evil,
ice powers.

I recommend trying this exercise out! It's fun to see how different color palettes can drastically change a character or seeing why certain colors work or don't work as well.

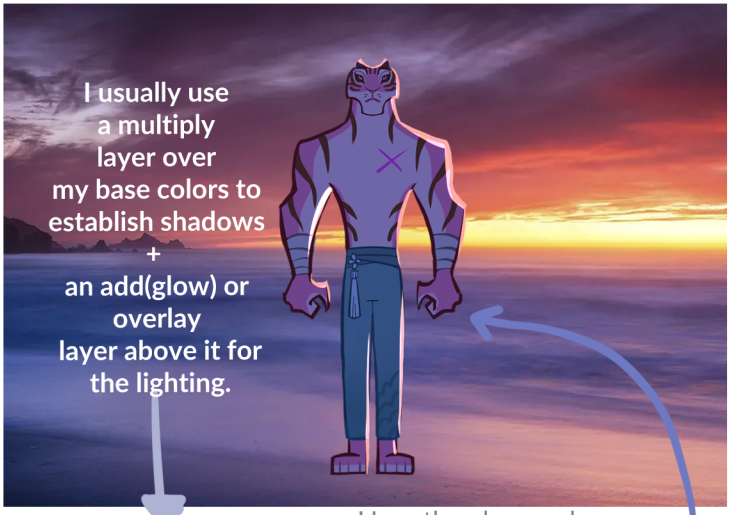
Matching Character Colors to a Background

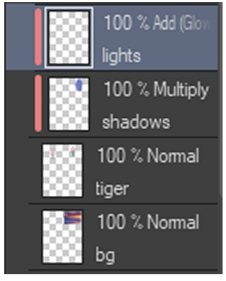
Usually, placing a character onto a background without adjusting their colors can look off / copypasted on.



Some things I try to identify: overall background color palette, lighting, lighting direction, etc. Your figure is usually going to be affected by their surrounding environment colors.

Since the bg lighting is overall purple colors with orange lighting coming from the right, I'll need to match my character to that.


I usually use a multiply layer over my base colors to establish shadows
+
an add(glow) or overlay layer above it for the lighting.



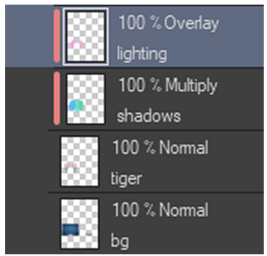
Here the glow and multiply layer are clipped to my character's colors to ensure I don't color over the background

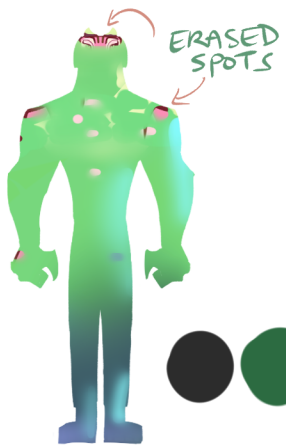
Eyedrop vs Color actually used

Note: It's not always as simple as eyedropping the bg and using that as your multiply color. Here it makes my shadows a lot darker than I actually want, so I slightly lightened it.

Play around with the multiply color to get different effects/moods. I tend to eyeball when colorpicking and adjust from there.

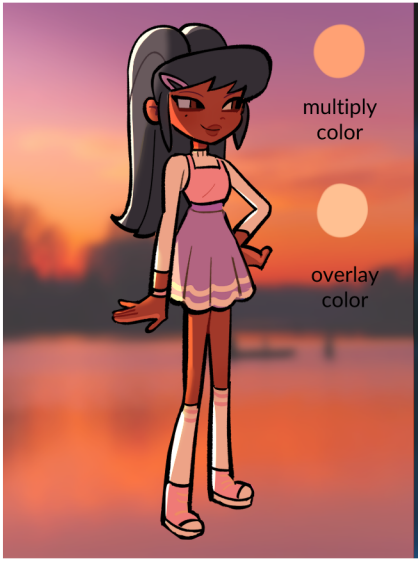
Ex: There's no bright green in this underwater bg but I've still used it for my multiply color because it looks cool *shrug*





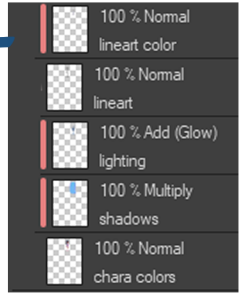
Depending on how complex or realistic you want your shading, you can also put in stuff like gradients, bounce light, etc!

Here's some more examples!



Up to you what type of blending layer you like to use for lighting, I prefer overlay, but will use add (glow) for stronger lighting or rim lights.

ORIG.

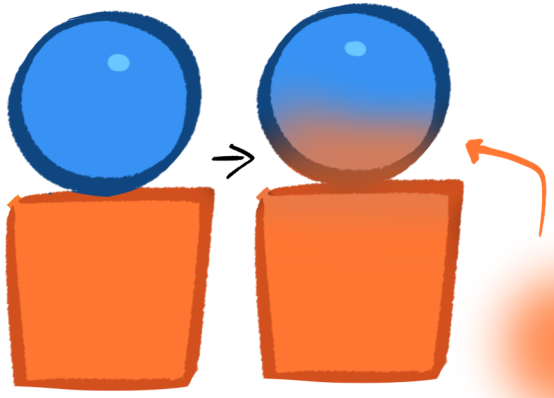


Note how different some of the palettes are compared to the character's original colors.

It can be tricky keeping a character's colors recognizable while under drastically different lighting - but it's important for a lot of color design work!

Creating a Soft Effect with Colors

Here's how I create a very soft look with my art.



One trick is including or exaggerating the bounce light of objects using the airbrush and blur tool.

For people, I like to make the skin glow and bounce a lot of its color onto surrounding objects (Adding airbrushed blush also helps a lot IMO.)

Careful with the blur tool, though! It's easy to overdo the color mixing and can make colors muddier than you actually want it.

Even a subtle touch can add softness.

Airbrushing the exact skin color onto the lineart of the eyelash makes it disappear a bit.

You can use a color slighter darker than the skin color so it stays visible but still has that soft look.

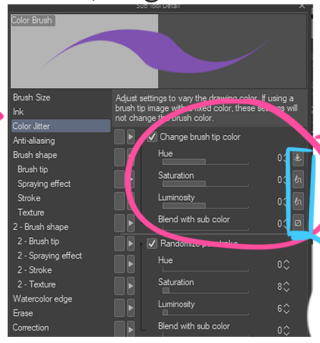
SOFT!

Sometimes I airbrush the bg color slightly onto the edges.

Color Jitter

Automatically changes your hue, brightness and saturation as you draw.

Choose a brush and then click settings to find the color jitter tab.

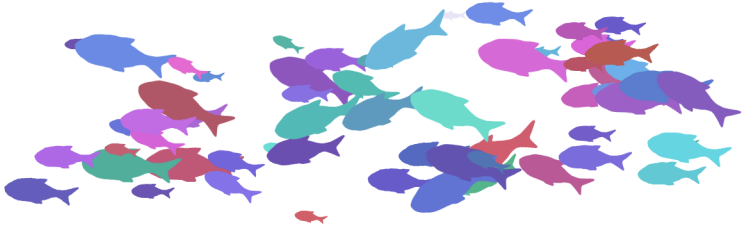


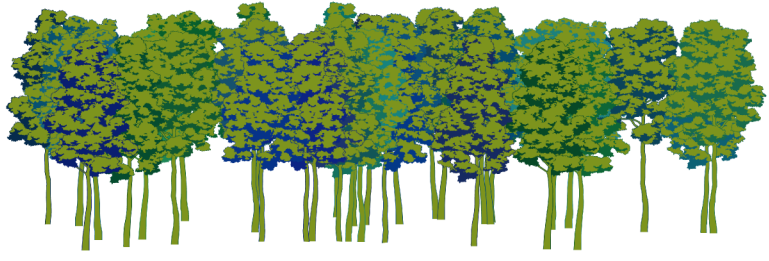
You can use this to set the range of how much your colors will change in a single brush stroke. Smaller values = more subtle color shifts

Then, choose whether your colors will be randomized or change based on your pen pressure with these side buttons.

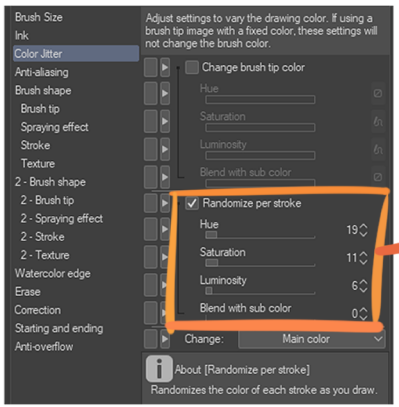
I'm using csp but photoshop, procreate & paint tool sai 2 have this option as well (might be called color dynamics or hue jitter depending on what you use)

This is especially useful for object patterns.
Saves you more time than changing each object color manually!



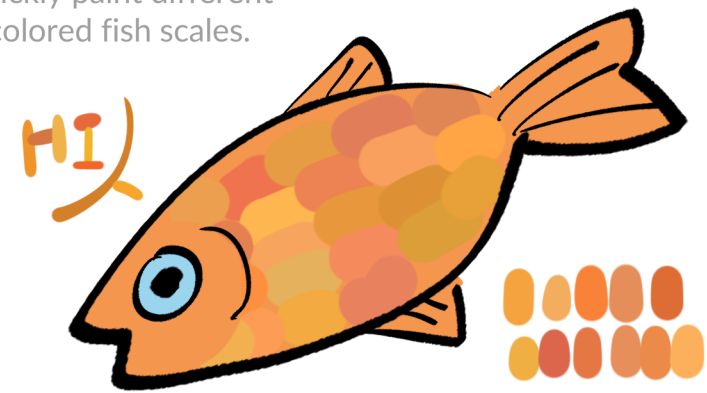


Color Jitter Part II



You can also set it so colors change with multiple brush strokes rather than a single one. AKA each separate brush stroke = a different color.

Ex: I used color jitter to quickly paint different colored fish scales.



Setting lower values results in more subtle color shifts/ analogous palettes.

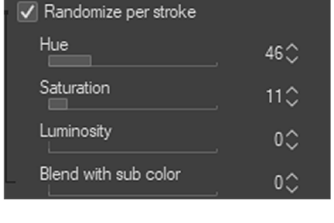
Using higher values result in color shifts that are a lot different /go farther from the base color.

You can use color jitter to help vary up your color palette.

Putting down flats here. This is nice but I'd like to add more.

Using color jitter to introduce new colors into my palette.

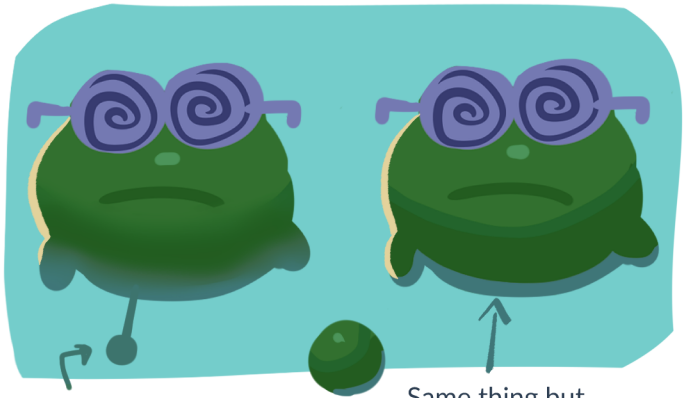
Then I go in and refine with my regular brushes!



Desaturated Bounce Lights

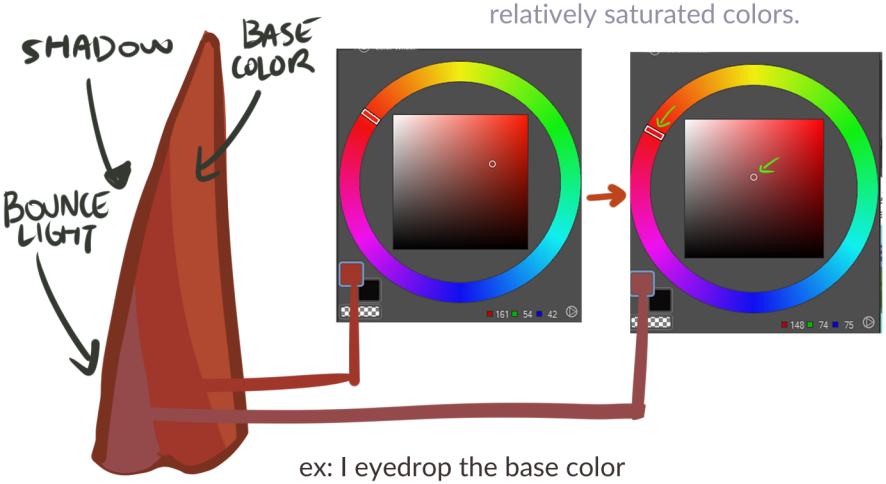
Usually the bounce light is influenced by its surrounding colors, but sometimes if there isn't a bg or surrouding color, I just default to using desaturated hues that are close to the base color.

Personally I think it looks best when paired with relatively saturated colors.



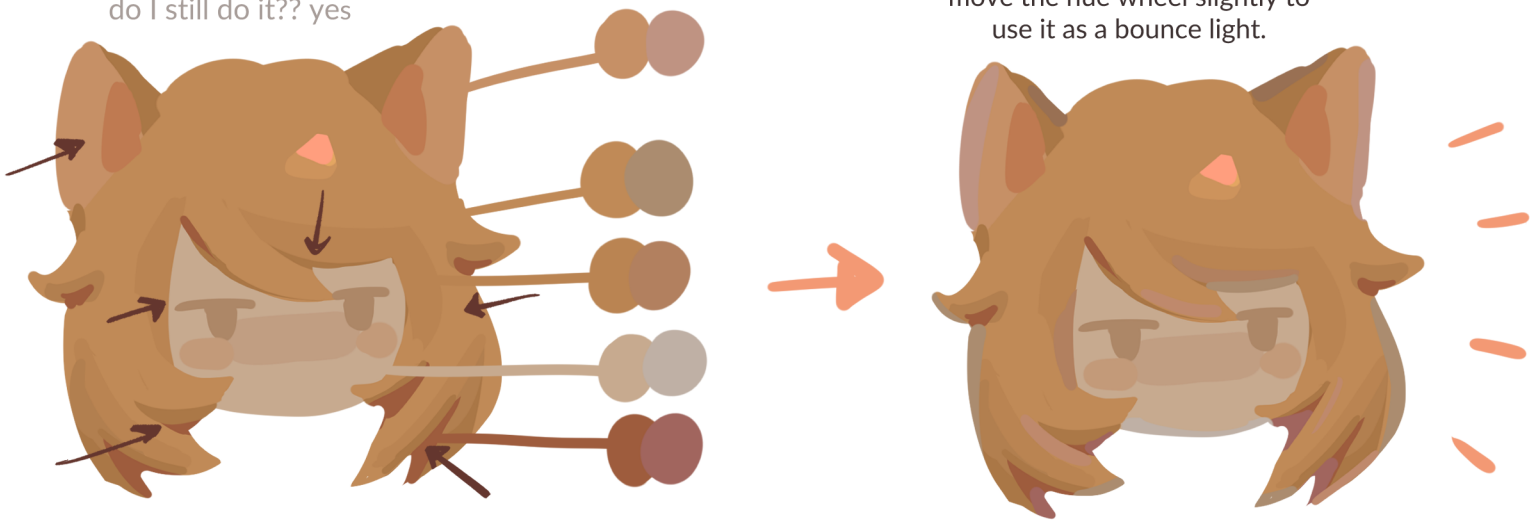
Reflected light

Same thing but with hard edges (how I like to color)



ex: I eyedrop the base color and then move the picker left to desaturate it and move the hue wheel slightly to use it as a bounce light.

Is it always realistic...no. do I still do it?? yes



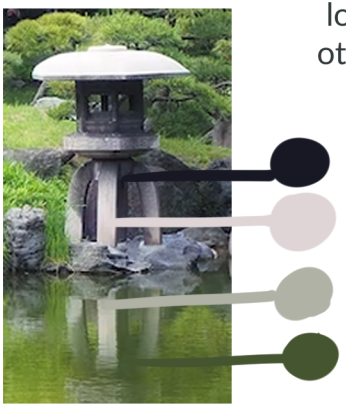
I do the same here for each color (usually the shadows) and desaturate + hue shift a bit then add it back to the original color. The subtle variety of bounce light hues look nice...

Anyways it's just an extra touch that I think looks cool + adds quick dimension without having me think too hard about lighting.

Quick Reflections /Cast Shadows

For relatively still bodies of water, shiny wood floors, wet surfaces, etc.

Some reflections look more defined, others more unclear.

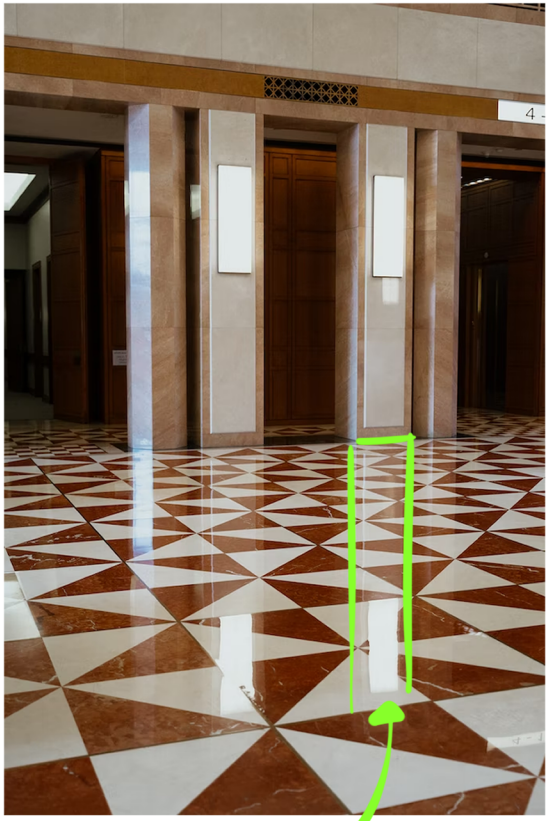


Reflection here has a greenish hue.

Reflection colors can be influenced by surrounding colors.

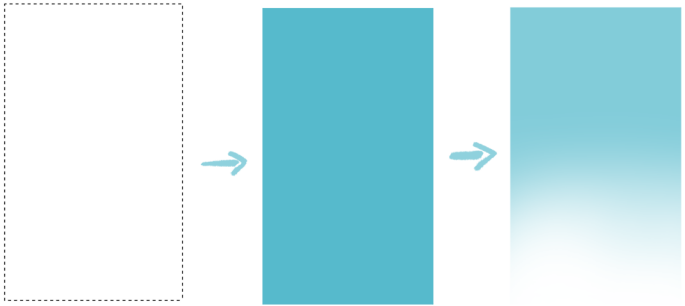
Usually, the smoother the surface, the clearer the reflection.

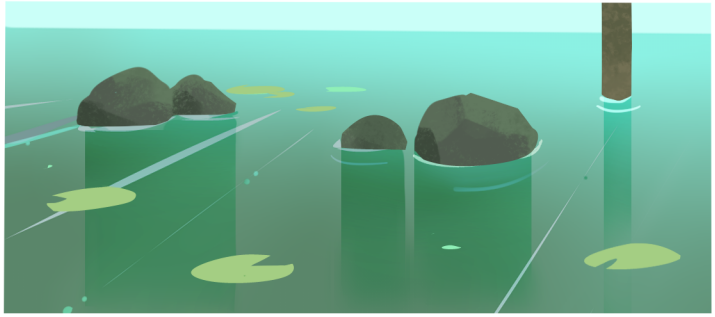
I try to think about where the lighting is coming from, how clear the surface that the objects are being reflected on is, etc.



Fades off near the end.

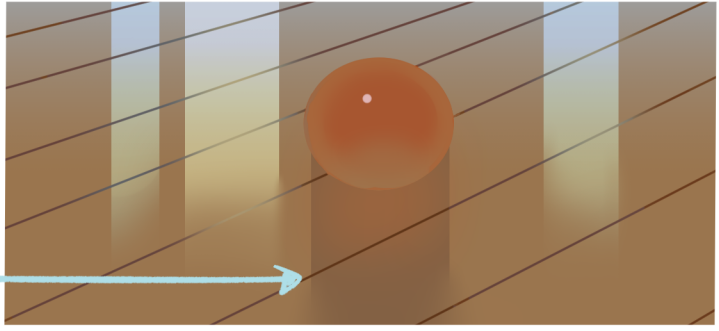
One way I like to draw these is by using the rectangle selection tool to get a clean shape, and filling it in with color.

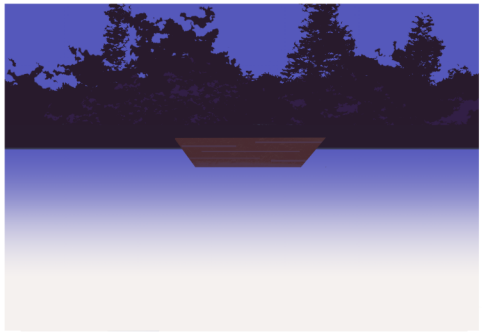




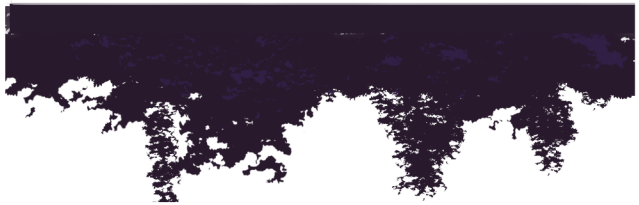
Then, I decrease layer opacity, and use a soft eraser to fade out the end. If you want you can also play around and change the layer to overlay.

(Here I used the same technique for cast shadows but I changed the layer to multiply)



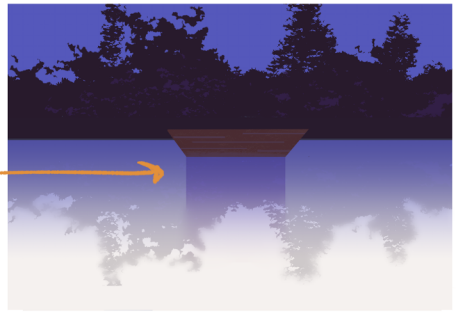


You can also select and flip the parts of the bg you want reflected.
Here I flipped the trees and then lowered the layer opacity.

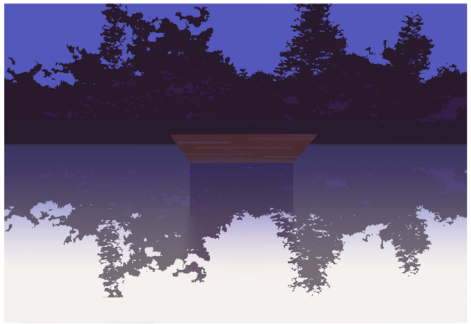


It's up to you what type you want to convey!

Less clear reflection / lower opacity.



Very clear / high opacity.



I put an overlay layer at a lowered opacity for the boat.

Soft blur to fade end.

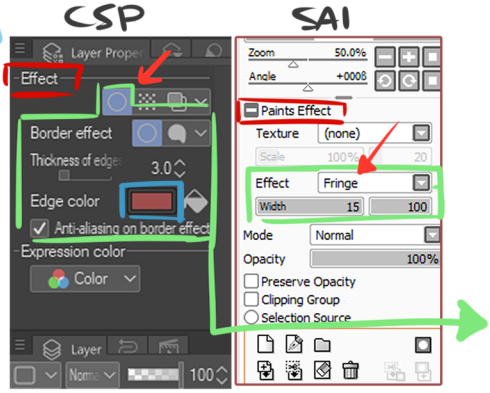
I used a fingertip brush for the ripples, but a smudge brush would work as well.

Have fun and play around with it!

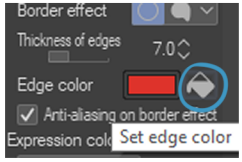
Quick Glow Band

Instead of manually adding a band of saturated color around your lighting every time, you can use the fringe effect instead.

Find 'effect' under layer properties or paint effect setting (might be named differently depending on software.)



Here you can adjust the outline color (in csp at least) and line thickness.



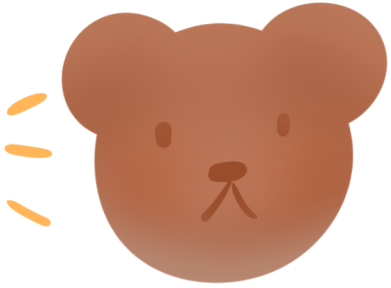
You can use this button to set your outline color to whatever you have eyedropped.

This creates an outline effect around all your brush strokes. I've seen ppl commonly use this for bubble words, hair strands, shoelaces, etc.

note: be careful when resizing the outline layer, it can make it look crunchy :(

Here's a way you can use the effect for lighting!

1. First, establish the direction of your lighting.

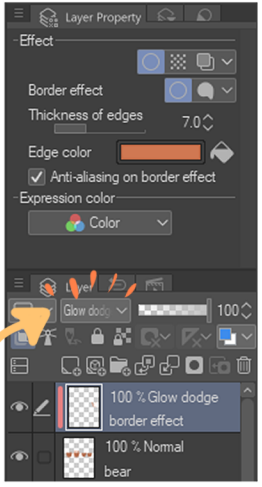


Then make a layer above your drawing and turn on the border effect.

2. 3.

Paint in your lighting. feel free to experiment with outline color! Here I just set it slightly in between the lighting color and the surrounding color.

You can change the border effect layer to 'screen,' 'glow dodge, 'add glow,' etc for really strong lighting!



Another example!

Painting in lighting on a separate layer

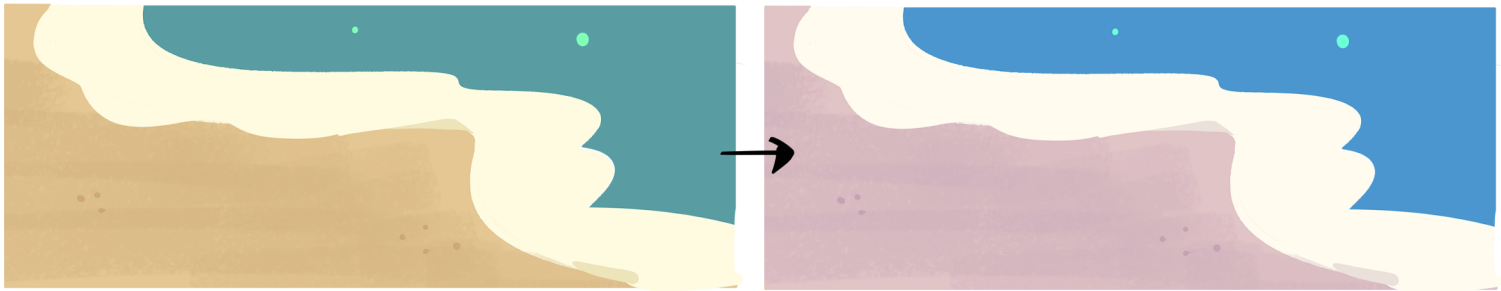
Turning on border effect for that layer

(no screen/add/dodge used this time)

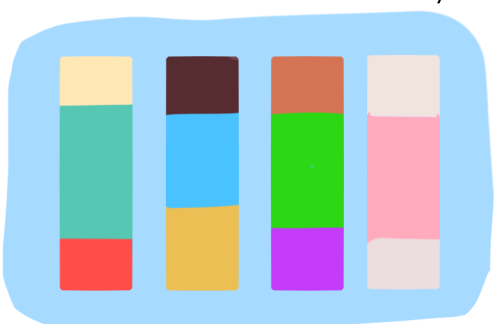
Tying Colors Together

Using a low opacity color on a multiply/overlay/blending layer to tie your palette together is a common method! (the lower the opacity, the more subtle it will look.)

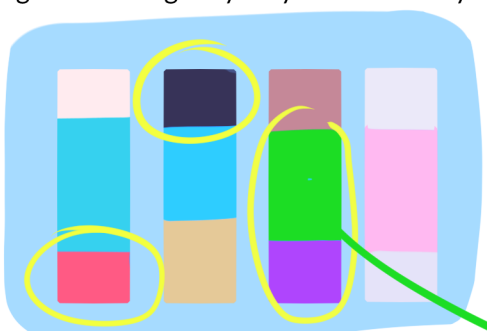
Overlay on 55% opacity



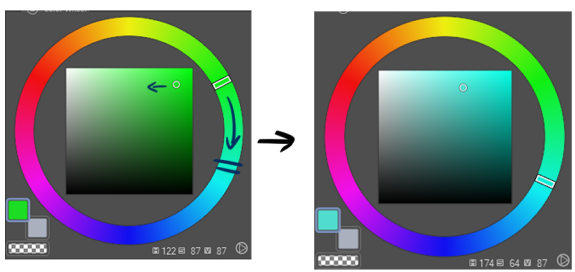
However sometimes using multiply/overlay isn't enough to tie all your colors together perfectly. Always relying on it to magically fix your colors may not always work.



Here each bar has very different colors and seems to clash with eachother.

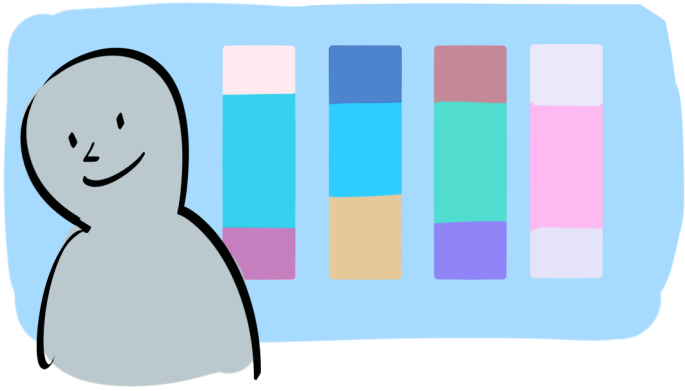


Setting a blue overlay layer on top helps somewhat...but some colors still clash. Usually at this point I go in and change certain colors manually.

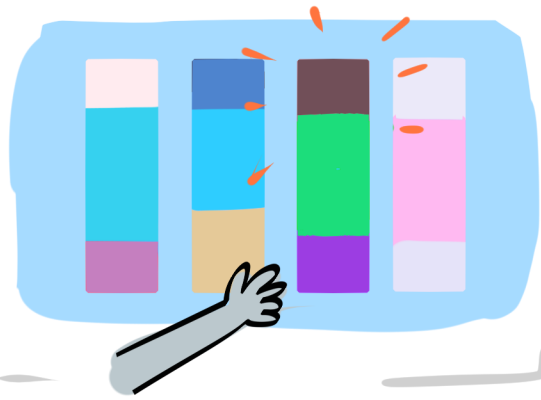


Ex: Shifted hue towards blue and moving the hue picker a bit left to desaturate it. I do this for all circled colors.

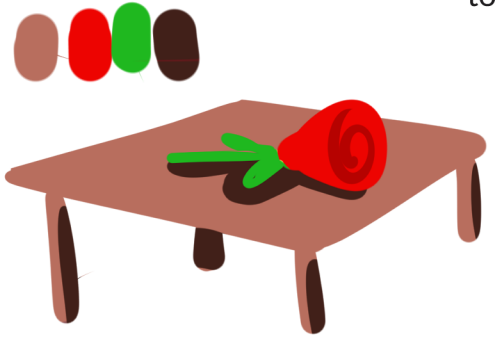
Now it's much more cohesive!



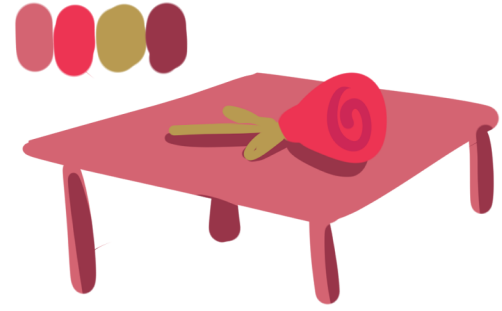
Alternatively I could also leave one bar darker and/or more saturated than the others to make it the focus! (I still hue shifted towards blue though)



Basically - blending layers are super useful but it's also good to know how to unify colors yourself!

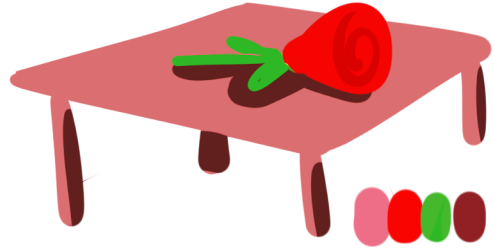


Original colors.



Picking colors again except I manually hue shift original colors towards this pink color.

overlay at 50%



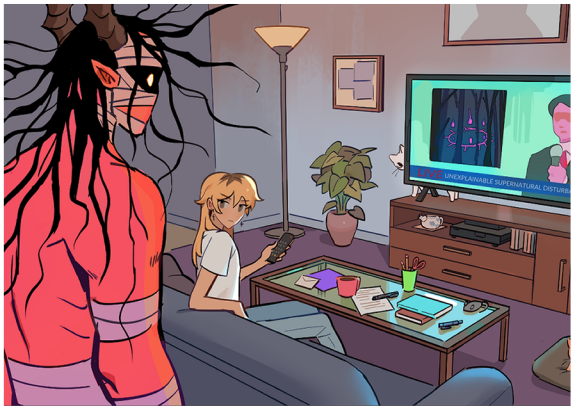
VS

Original colors with an overlay pink layer on top.

Analyzing My Color Process

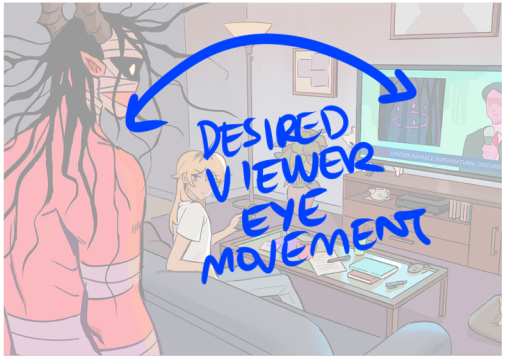
1

Base Colors



I always try to consider what my intentions are with colors. (a fun way to think about it is to ask yourself if you want a color to be the main character or a random npc in the crowd)

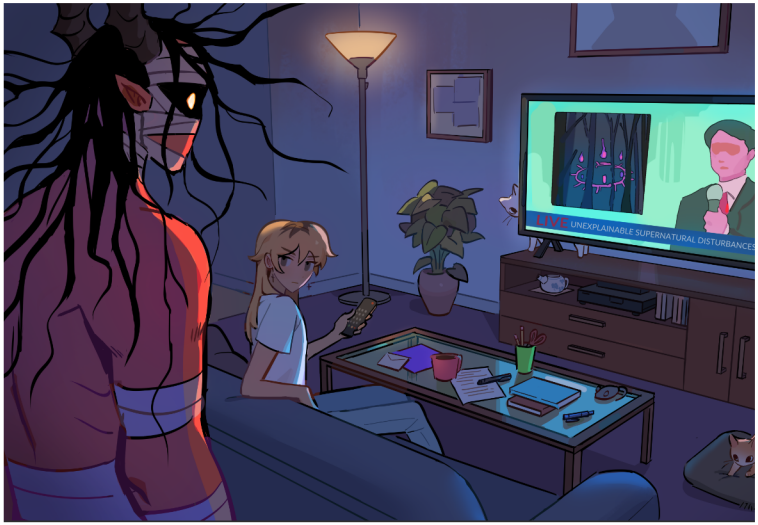
2



Here, I want the monster and the tv screen to draw the most focus in this scene. They are the 'main characters.'

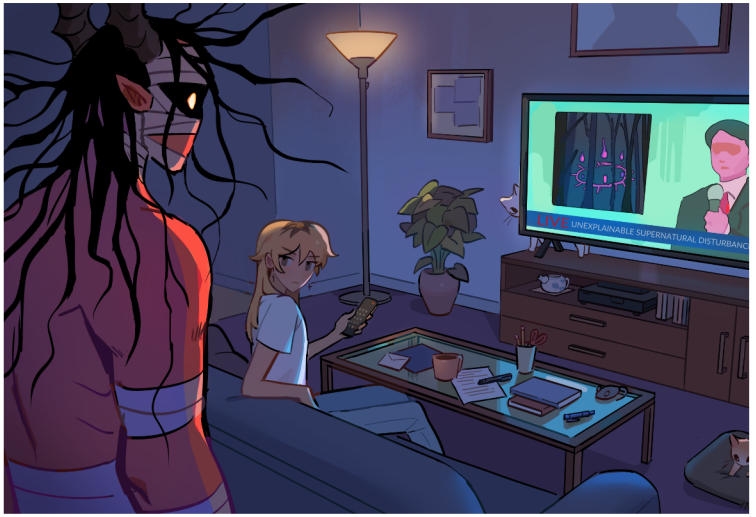
3

Multiply layer adds a drastic change to the atmosphere - but here I notice that the items on the table draw the eye unnecessarily.



4

Changing them to more desaturated/ less bright colors helps keep focus away.

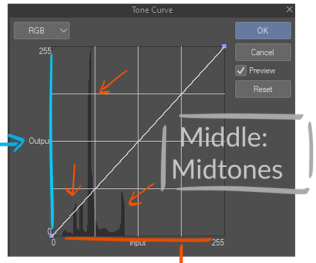


Tone Curve tool

(edit> tonal correction > tone curve)

Shows how much brightness (dark/light/highlight) is in an image. You can change these individually using points on the curve.

The vertical axis shows your new changed values (output).

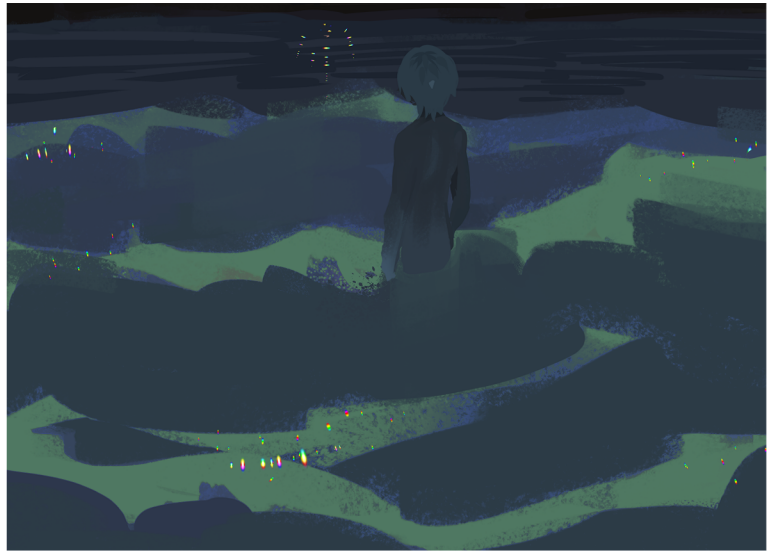


Middle: Midtones

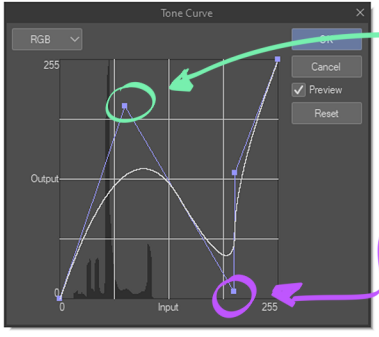
Top right: light areas of your art

The horizontal axis shows the image's original values (input). My art here is fairly dark so it's mostly showing up on the bottom left of the graph. (looks like little peaks)

Bottom left: the shadows of your art



You can create multiple points on the curve and move them around to drastically change your brightness.



I brought this point up to **lighten** the shadows of the art, and kept this point down to **darken** the light areas (ie: wave froth)

It can be kind of confusing so I recommend playing around with it yourself to understand it better.

You can also make it so it doesn't affect all the colors (RGB) and only a specific color in your art.

Here, I changed 'RGB' to 'Green', now the tone curve will only affect green tones.

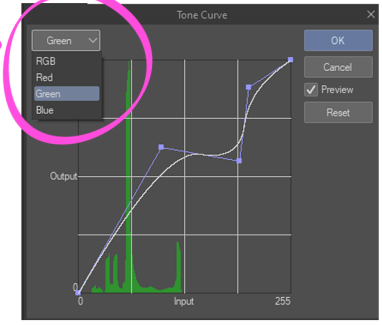
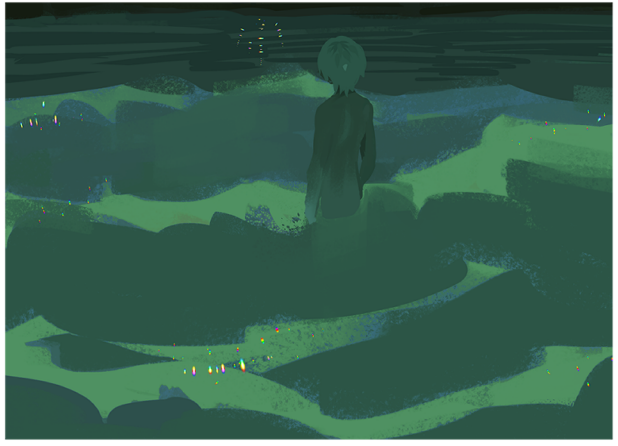


Image only using green with tone curve.

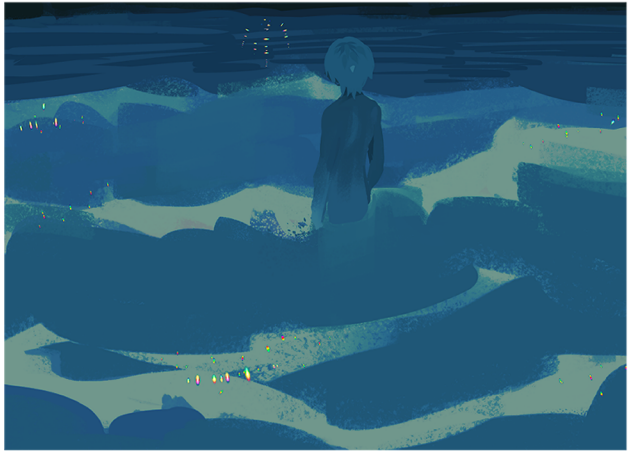


Or you can even set the tone curve points for each color (red/green/blue) individually!

(It'll save your curve points even when you swap over from green - > blue , etc. Then you hit the 'ok' button when you're satisfied)

Using them all separately

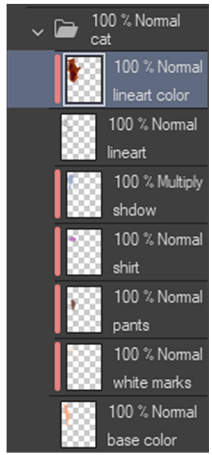
This can make for some cool color effects!



Color Organization

Instead of squinting at thumbnails, try getting into the habit of labeling your layers!
(Especially if you're going to be handing the file to somebody else - you want it to be as clear as possible.)

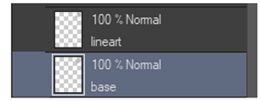
Even when coloring a relatively simple character like this, my layers might look like:



If it's too tedious separating and labeling every element, at least try to group similar things together!
ex: a coloring layer just for 'clothes.'

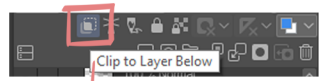
And if you hate dealing with so many layers, try make use of folders. It's a great way to keep track of a ton of layers.

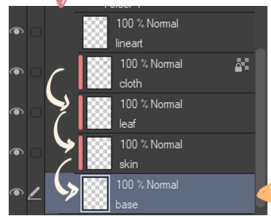
As for how I organize my colors...usually I start with lines!



After setting down lines, I fill in a base color layer. This is where I make sure nothing is outside the lines + no random white spots, etc.

I use the clipping tool, to 'clip' a layer to the base layer below it. This means that if I paint in the skin color, it will stay within the boundary of the base color.





BTW: If you clip a layer to a layer that is already clipped, that layer will simply clip to the original layer.

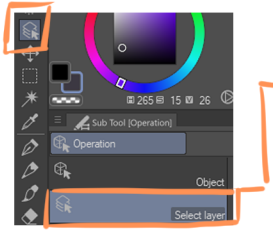
IMO this method is more efficient for me, as opposed to doing it normally and having to check for mistakes after each element is colored.

Having a base color gets it done for me all in one go, if that makes sense!

Finding Layers

Turning off /on every layer you have
to find where you drew a specific thing can be tiring.
Save yourself some time by learning shortcuts!

Holding ctrl + shift in CSP and clicking on
specific area of your art can
find what layer it's on. (In Photoshop,
I believe it's ctrl + click
with the move tool (V).



Or you can use the
operation tool>select layer
instead of the shortcut,
it does the same thing.

This will only identify
the top-most layer though,
from what I've seen.

You can also use ctrl+shift and click to
drag a box around the area you want to find,
and it'll highlight all the included layers instead
of just the one on top.

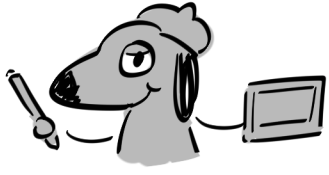
Non-Destructive Workflow

A nondestructive workflow means being able to make changes to your art without 'destroying' the original image. I like working destructively at times, but it's also important to know how to avoid that if needed. Here's some ways (in my opinion) that can be destructive and non-destructive.

Destructive Examples:

- Making significant changes to the original file without any form of backups.
- Merging your lineart and color layers together.
- Changing colors directly on the color layer.
- Sizing significantly smaller images up fit the canvas.

Non-Destructive Examples:

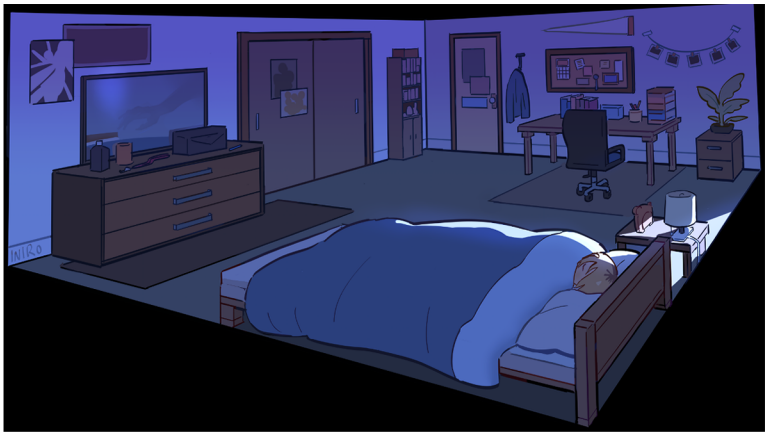


- If you do want to work destructively, at least make a duplicate folder of everything first.
- If you need to merge layers, merge. But if you can achieve the same effect by creating a new layer, try doing that first!
- Using adjustment layers for color/tonal changes.
- If you are making something that will be sized up/down, try using vectors instead of a raster file so that there will be no loss when the image is used at various sizes.

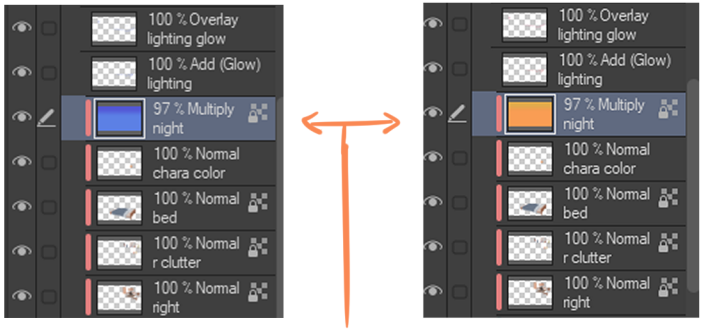
Yes, Ctrl+Z is useful! But often times it's too far into the process to ctrl+z, or you've already done something else to your art that you DO want to keep. Forming non-destructive habits helps makes things more streamlined, flexible, and organized.

TLDR: Basically always assume that future changes will need to be made to your art, give yourself a safety net!

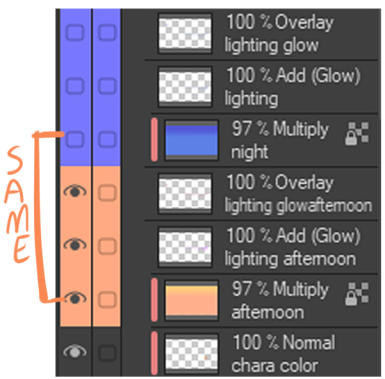
Ex: Non destructively changing the lighting in this art from night to late afternoon.



Let's say I was asked to provide a variation of this background with late afternoon orange lighting.


100 % Overlay lighting glow
100 % Add (Glow) lighting
97 % Multiply night
100 % Normal chara color
100 % Normal bed
100 % Normal r clutter
100 % Normal right
100 % Overlay lighting glow
100 % Add (Glow) lighting
97 % Multiply night
100 % Normal chara color
100 % Normal bed
100 % Normal r clutter
100 % Normal right

If I was working destructively, I would simply take my night multiply layer and use tonal correction to shift my colors to orange, and then directly change everything else (lighting glow layer, etc) to match the orange...


SAME
100 % Overlay lighting glow
100 % Add (Glow) lighting
97 % Multiply night
100 % Overlay lighting glowafternoon
100 % Add (Glow) lighting afternoon
97 % Multiply afternoon
100 % Normal chara color

However, this means that if I needed to revert my changes, I would have to go back and fix everything to what it was before.

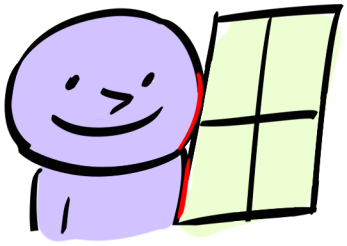
Instead, if I duplicate my 'night' and other lighting layers, shift the colors to orange, and turn off my original layers, I can switch between night and afternoon without 'destroying' any work I've done.

(I also changed the layer names and color coded the two to keep better track of them.)

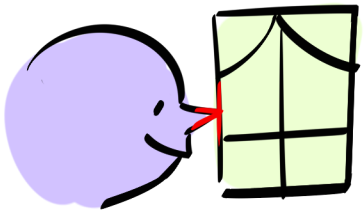
Tangents (Bonus Page)

Often times unintentional tangents can make your lines unclear and decreases its sense of depth.

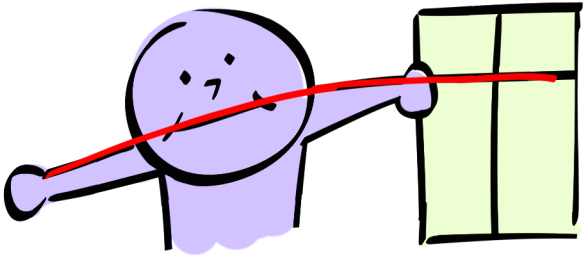
EX:



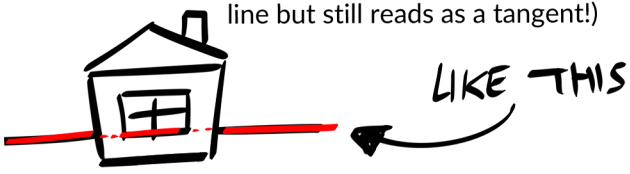
The side of the head and window are touching. It's hard to tell if this person is next to the window or in front of it.



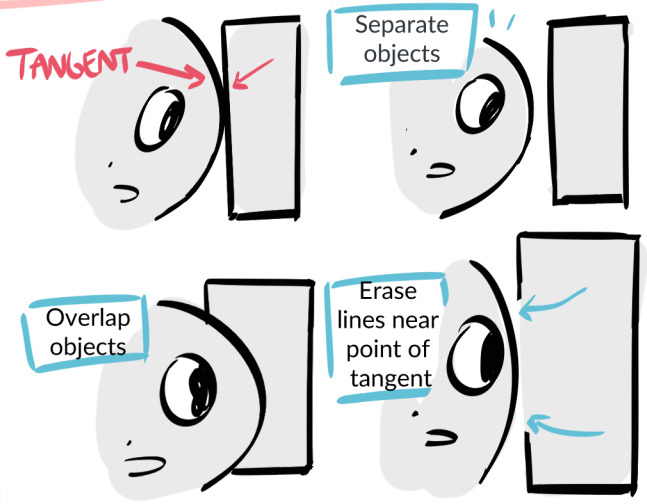
Line of the nose seems to be poking the window.

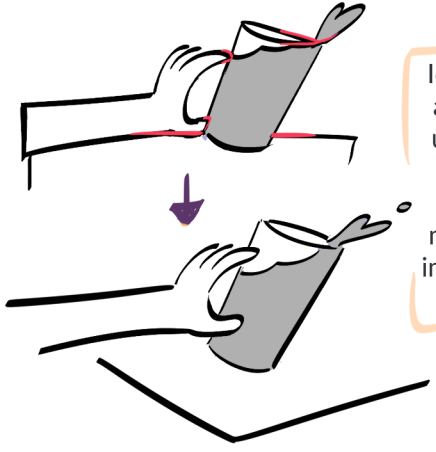


The arms, smile, and window all share the same line.
(Note: The line of the smile isn't directly connected to the arm line but still reads as a tangent!)



Potential ways to address unwanted tangents:

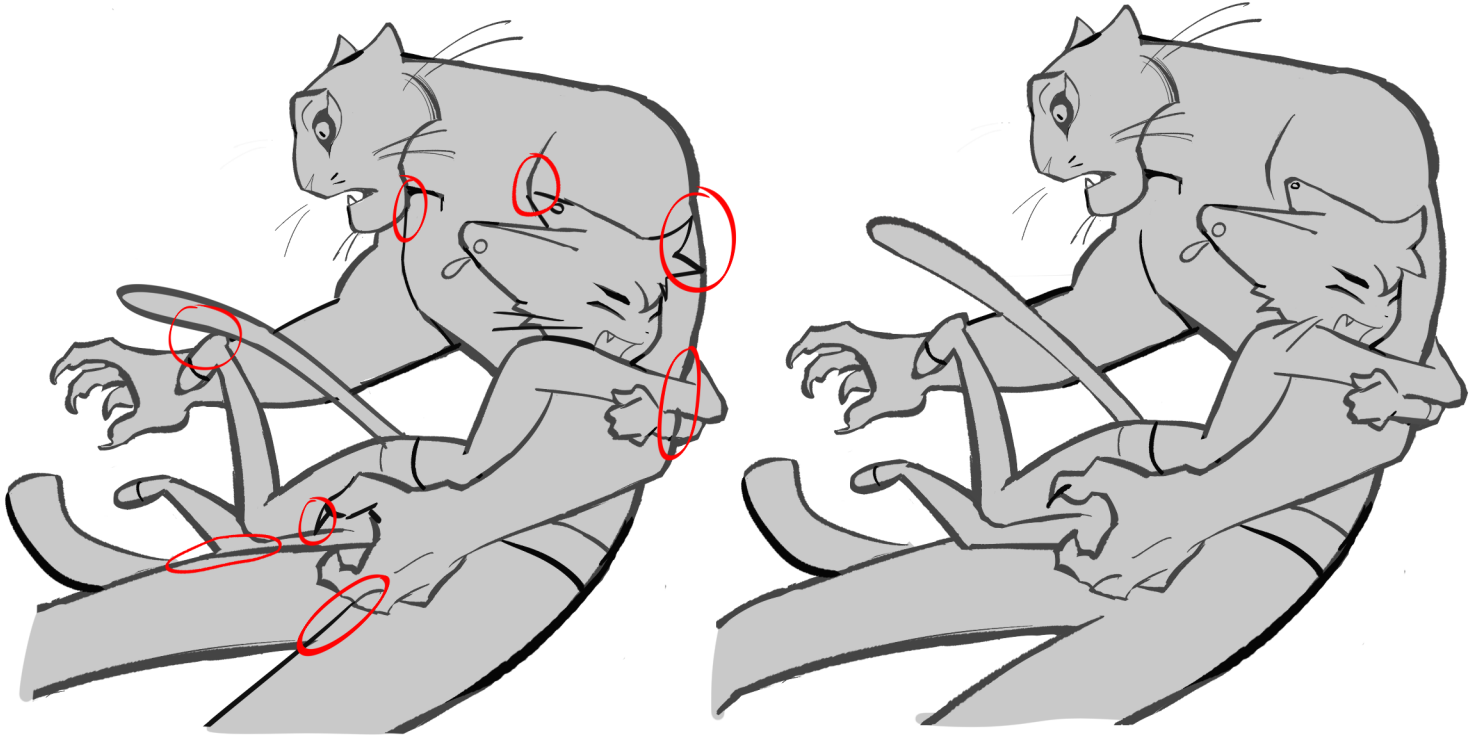




Identifying and fixing unwanted tangents helps make your image more readable

Here's another example of how I try to reduce tangents in my work.

(Note: Not all tangents are bad - a lot of artists even use them intentionally!
These tips are meant for those that decrease clarity and add unwanted flatness.



You've reached the end!

Thank you for the support. I hope this pdf was helpful in some way :-)

If you'd like to see more of my art and process work (like on this page) feel free to support me on patreon!

patreon.com/iniro
twitter.com/eskbl

ok love you all, bye!!! - ini